

THE PRESIDENT.

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WHY HE SHOULD BE
RE-ELECTED.

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THE PRESIDENT.

Wisely or unwisely, the Presidential Campaign of 1864 has opened.

And now that it has begun, it is desirable in every point of view that it be ended as soon as possible by the nomination. The Union men of the country will naturally wish to know at the earliest moment who is to carry their standard, that they may be able to devote all their time and force to the prosecution of the war and the restoration of the Union, instead of wasting them in personal squabbles among themselves.

Indeed, the whole policy of delay is revealed by the *N.Y. Herald*, the most unscrupulous opponent of Mr. Lincoln, which says, that, to defeat his nomination, it is only necessary to postpone the meeting of the convention. And wherever a postponement of the nomination is favored, it is by those who prefer to see Mr. Lincoln set aside for some other candidate. Delay in the action of the convention is urged upon the assumption that the candidacy of Mr.

Lincoln is to depend not upon the whole course of his administration for three years in the midst of frightful and unprecedented perils and disasters, but simply upon the issue of one campaign, which, by the admission of the objectors, is in the best hands to which it could be confided. Now, to this reasoning we utterly object. The objectors admit that the present Administration has been, upon the whole, so "successful and fair," that it inspires more confidence than any untried Administration is likely to do. Why then, we ask, should it be condemned by one detail? Upon what reasonable grounds is it maintained that the general success of three years is to be outweighed by the issue of a single campaign?

If, in the extraordinary exigencies of these three years, Mr. Lincoln has shown admirable sagacity and fidelity; if he has truly represented the great public opinion of that very heterogeneous mass, the American people, and has brought their cause steadily forward toward victory;—we cannot agree that it is a wise thing to set him aside, even if General Grant does not annihilate or disperse the rebel armies before the first of September, or even if he should suffer a reverse.

Should the summer campaign be fortunate, the opponents of Mr. Lincoln concede his nomination. But should it be unfortunate, it seems to us that the country will need more than ever a President whom it thoroughly knows. If we fail, an entire change of the executive department, except upon clear evidence of its culpability, would be as unwise as it would have been in the anguish and dismay of the first Bull Run defeat. Such moments are the very emergencies in which nations need tried, and not untried, magistrates. The sacrifice of leaders to the rage and chagrin of momentary disappointment is surely not the action of an intelligent people nor will it be the counsel of truly wise and patient men. The fallacy of the argument may be seen by supposing the campaign successful, the President re-elected, and the following winter and spring operations unfortunate. He will then be the President for four more years, and yet by this argument the event of the campaign will show that he ought not to have been elected.

Again, since there is a President to be elected in November, and since he ought certainly, in order to secure a full and fair canvass, to be nominated at least two or three months before the election, it is clear that the argument for postponement drawn from the campaign is inconclusive, because it cannot be assumed that the campaign will end before the fine weather is passed. The battles of Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chicamauga, and Lookout Mountain were all fought in the autumn or winter; and because we may be unfortunate in the opening, it does not follow that we may not be victorious at the close of the campaign. If it be asked whether great reverses during the summer would not be a proof of incompetency in the conduct of the war which ought to be rebuked rather than rewarded, the reply is in the other question whether the best soldiers known to the country, and most cordially approved by loyal men, are not now in the chief military positions, and vested with all necessary discretion? If they are, and—after doing their best—fail, do true Union men propose to sneer at the “interference” and “mismanagement” in Washington? Lieutenant-General Grant with a practically supreme military command, directs the pending military operations. Even the stoutest advocates of postponing the nomination profess full faith in his ability to annihilate or disperse the rebel armies, but if he does not—woe to the President! is their remarkable conclusion. That he will be held responsible is very possible. That disappointment will produce a reaction which may lead to unhappy results, as it did in New-York two years ago when Mr. Seymour was elected Governor is very likely; but we are now considering what is wisest—what really thoughtful and loyal men and journals ought to advise.

Inasmuch, then, if Mr. Lincoln is re-nominated, it should be for what he has done, and not for what General Grant, or any other general, is or is not going to do, we wish that the nomination could be made by May-day. Then all difference among loyal Union men would cease, and their undivided interest, sympathy and energy would be given to the prosecution of the war. On the other hand, if the nomination be deferred until September, the whole summer

will ring with the preliminary contest. To be exposed to such a debate for five months more, then to be involved possibly in disaster, and obliged, in the midst of the universal tumult and disappointment, to select a candidate for the Presidency, does not seem to us to promise a very desirable result. How the Union men are to gain in unity, peace and concord by such a course we do not see. Indeed, the collective wisdom of Mr. Belmont's Chicago Convention would undoubtedly advise us to do that very thing. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri*. Find out what the enemy wishes you to do, and then with all your might don't do it, was Napoleon's advice.

We are the friends of all the gentlemen named for the Union candidacy. But we have a preference among them which does not in the least involve our personal respect and regard for either of them. We are very profoundly convinced that it is better for the good cause that Mr. Lincoln be retained. But, should the people in their Convention decide otherwise, we shall, with all loyal men acquiesce. All that can be asked of the friends of any Union candidate is that they shall openly declare their submission to the final verdict of the people in that Convention; and, therefore, it is justly complained that many of the friends of General Frémont, for instance, present his name as a candidate in any case, and that they wage war upon an Administration which they helped to bring into power, and which has carried out their own general policy—not always, indeed, in the precise way, nor exactly as fast as they wished—with a ferocity which no Copperhead surpasses. They speak of Mr. Lincoln very much as they spoke of Mr. Buchanan. Is such conduct fair, or is it wise? Does any sane Unionman propose, by an exasperating quarrel in our own camp, to give the Presidency of the United States to Mr. Amos Kendall, Judge Woodward and the Seymours, in the person of General McClellan? Are we to insist that our own candidate shall be nominated by the convention, or we will bolt?

We wish indeed that the Union men could be spared a contest for the nomination. But since that is impossible, let the claims of every candidate be fully considered—but considered as among friends, not enemies. There can be no more conspicuous folly than

for Union men to declare that they will not vote for this or that candidate; for if the one whom they renounce should be nominated, they must either eat humble pie, which is never pleasant, or they must, by running a third ticket, give the election to the party for whose success the rebels pray, which, at this juncture, is the ruin of the Government and a crime against mankind

If the Union men, whatever their personal preferences for the nomination may be, are true to the country and the cause, the candidate of their Convention will be the next President. But if they are untrue—if the conflict of preference shall throw them out of power, the result will be not only the practical success of the rebellion; it will be much worse than that; it will be the proof that in a republic, even in the agony of civil war, party-spirit is stronger than patriotism. Not only our Government will be destroyed, but its principle will be discredited forever.

The practical question before us, therefore, is whether, under all the circumstances, it is wise to change the President.

Obviously, in the midst of a war which, begun amidst the sneers and skepticism of foreign governments, and the sad doubt and fear of true men at home, has yet advanced to a near prospect of final victory, it would be a great moral advantage to retain, before all the world, the same general front; to say, on the one hand, to the rebels that the terrible experience of the three years past will be the experience of the four or five to come, if they do not yield; and to the world at large that the people of the United States are steadily bent upon the original purpose of the war, and by every legitimate means whatever, inflexibly mean to restore the Union and maintain the Government. If, indeed, the condition of public affairs were different; if our military lines had been constantly marked by disaster; if the rebellion had evidently strengthened itself; if there were a reasonable expectation that the Government might be overthrown; if trade were prostrated or industry paralyzed; if we had been overtaken by crushing financial calamity; if there were no fair prospect of recruiting our armies with veterans and the best of new men; if the measures of the Government at home had been such as to create

a powerful and threatening opposition, or had been unfaithful to human liberty ; in a word if there were not a general conviction deep down in the heart of the people that, allowing for all faults and mistakes, and weaknesses, from which no men and no administration can be free, yet, under all the circumstances, military, social, and political, public affairs have been upon the whole, and certainly so far as the President is concerned, sagaciously and honestly conducted, then a change in the head of the Government would be not only wise, but it would be inevitable.

Now, that the conduct of the war has been, upon the whole, satisfactory, is evident from the fact that the political struggle is not really between the Administration and the Opposition, but among the Union men themselves. No loyal Union man proposes a serious change in the present policy, which consists in military force and emancipation; and therefore a change of President is advocated upon theoretical grounds.

It is urged that a second Presidential term is never desirable, and the argument is fortified by the advice of Washington and Jackson, each of whom, nevertheless, were twice elected. And why were they so? Simply because the people preferred them to any other candidates. So, in many of the States, the same Governor has been re-elected for many consecutive years, because of the popular satisfaction with the man and his services. Is not that liberty of choice of the very essence of a free government? Is it not, for instance, as a rule, better that a representative who really represents the feelings of his constituency, should be sent for many terms to Congress, than that an inexperienced person should be sent every two years? The biennial election may be, and often justly is, simply the declaration of entire satisfaction with the service of the representative. It would certainly be a remarkable exception in the practice of a popular system, if the representative must, of necessity, be displaced. The doctrine of rotation in office is the result of a misapprehension of popular government. No State, or city, or nation, or village would be necessarily better ordered, because the authorities were changed every month, or every year.

It is the regular frequency of elections which is the characteristic safeguard of our system. The object of the election is to allow the people to choose the man who best pleases them. But to make him ineligible after one term is to defeat that object, and compel them to adopt one who is not their preference. It is in effect to say either that a man who has been proved by experience to be fit for his office shall not continue to hold it, which is absurd; or else that he cannot safely be entrusted with it for more than one term, which is to assert that men are not honest enough to make our system practicable. Rotation in office is the doctrine of politicians who wish to have the best places, not of the people who wish to have the best magistrates.

Again, it is urged that if a President be eligible for more than one term he will use the enormous patronage of his office to secure his re-nomination. But it is very clear that to limit the term is not to prevent his corrupt use of patronage. He will, in that case, if inclined to abuse his power, merely turn his energies to securing the succession to the favorite of his party. And the objection lies against vesting patronage in any office whatever, because if a President may use his patronage to secure a renomination, a Secretary may use his to defeat the President. Take, for instance, the case of two conspicuous public men at this moment, upon the honorable character of each of whom no aspersion has ever been cast—we mean Mr. Lincoln, the President, and Mr. Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury. Each of them wields enormous patronage. The President, according to the argument should not be eligible for two terms lest he should misuse his patronage. Very well. And the Secretary of the Treasury?—If the reasoning be sound, he should not be eligible at all lest he should misuse *his*. Is it proposed, then, that no officer who commands patronage shall be eligible to the Presidency?

As a fact, however, the President is eligible for as many terms as the people shall elect; and, therefore, those who are opposed to the renomination of Mr. Lincoln, try to alarm the country by insisting that if he can so wield his patronage at this time as to secure his

re-election, it will be much easier for him, with half a million of soldiers and enormous treasures at his command, to have himself re-elected from term to term through his natural life ! This argument spares us the necessity of the *reductio ad absurdum*. For this is said of Mr. Lincoln; and unless we have entirely misapprehended the impression he has made upon the people, it would be as easy to persuade them to elect Mr. Vallandigham President as to believe Mr. Lincoln to be a new Aaron Burr.

The other argument against the renomination of Mr. Lincoln is not theoretical but practical; it is, that the people are mortified, humbled and disappointed by the duration of the war, for which, it is said, nothing but the vacillating policy of the President is responsible. Yet, whoever will deliberately picture to himself the condition of the country and of the public mind at the beginning of the war; the utter lack of general belief that there was to be a war; the want of an army and navy; the indifference and doubt of the great Democratic opposition at the North; the want of a sentiment of nationality; the question as to the coercive power of the Government; the political and social sympathy with the rebels; the hatred of abolitionism, and the careful excuse of men who said that they were willing to maintain the Union but not to touch slavery; the empty treasury; the universal scorn and jealousy of the Western European Powers; the long demoralization of the public mind, which had been carefully effected by Calhoun and his political school which had so long controlled the Government, and so successfully that some men now in high office were willing to let the South go, — whoever will recall all this will probably agree that the President had before him a task which required infinite sagacity, patience, and moderation. His success would depend upon his ability to interpret the real popular sentiment, and to distinguish between enthusiasm and conviction. If he lagged, or went too fast, he would equally fail. Every step he took must seem wise to the great public mind, whether it pleased or displeased the ardent van of thinkers and talkers, who are the educators, but not the representatives, of public opinion. Elected as a Republican, known as the author of

the saying in reference to slavery and freedom in this country, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," supposed (as he was supposed at that time) to be ruled by the Secretary of State who had declared the existence of the irrepressible conflict, Mr. Lincoln knew whatever might be the love of the Union—and even that was to be proved—the hate of abolitionism was practically universal. His object was, it ought to have been, to secure a party to sustain the Government, and that party must be, so far as practicable, the undivided North. Senator Yulee, of Florida, had openly said in Washington, what everybody feared: "The North will have enough to do to take care of itself." Franklin Pierce had written to Jefferson Davis that the war would be at the North. Had the President made a mistake, Yulee and Pierce would have been true prophets. Had the President said on the 15th April, 1861, "Slavery has attacked the Union, slavery is abolished," the suspicious jealousy of the opposition would have burst into full cry: "There! we knew it. He takes advantage of a riot in South Carolina to overthrow the Union and plunge us into civil war." But the President, equal to his great office, in the most solemn crisis of our history, said, simply, "The Union and Government must be maintained by force;" and the country, with its party spirit paralyzed, cried "Amen."

The President knew, what every thinking man knew, that the terrible light of war would illuminate the whole question of its origin and scope. He knew that every gun, and rifle, and pistol was a more persuasive anti-slavery orator than had ever been heard; that every drop of the blood of sons and brothers and friends would wash clear a thousand eyes that had been blinded, and that before long public opinion would justify and demand measures which some men then saw to be inevitable, but for which the country was not yet ready. Therefore, when General Frémont, one of those men, issued his order, the President said, "No, not yet. The policy must be general when it is adopted, and I must be the judge of the time and the way." So to General Hunter he said in substance: "I do not deny that it may become necessary to do what you have done, but I am the person to order it." There were many faithful men who, when

they heard his words, said, sadly, "He does not understand the case, and we are lost." There were many faithless men who thought "The rebellion is sure of success." If you say that he ought to have trusted the popular enthusiasm, which would have supported the extreme measures, at least you confess that it is only a question of relative sagacity between you and the President. You think the people were ready. He thought they were not. And observe that now, more than two years afterward, the Congress of the United States, almost purged of secessionists, can not make up its mind to pay colored soldiers, who have most bravely fought for the flag, the wages which the Government expressly agreed to pay them. Do you suppose they would debate the point a quarter of an hour if those soldiers were white?

The President can not rightfully do what he honestly thinks the people ought to wish, but what he honestly thinks they do wish, because only what they do wish will stand. There were men enough who said, when General Frémont's order came, "Certainly; arm the slaves, and they will make short work of the rebels." But within six months these same men were sighing for well-stocked plantations. The sagacity which distinguishes between the furious but evanescent gust of excitement and enthusiasm, and the steady trade-wind of principle is the very quality to be desired in a chief magistrate at this time; and among all the prominent men in our history from the beginning none have ever shown the power of understanding the popular mind more accurately than Mr. Lincoln. Nothing is more natural and more common than that an ardent man should in one breath declare that the people wish this or that course to be pursued, and in the next sneer at the President because he yields only to a pressure of the people. But what should he yield to? And did Mr. Lincoln ever resist it? Did he ever lag behind it? The President cannot treat the nation as a general does an army, and make it subject to his arbitrary will; and although the Constitution by creating him commander in chief, wisely entrusts during war the most important powers to his discretion, that

discretion consists in his wise estimate of the convictions and desires of the public mind as to their exercise.

From the beginning of his term the President has evidently been persuaded that this was a people's war; that, if the people were wise and brave enough, they would save the Union and the Government; and if they were not, then that no leader could or ought to save them. Twenty months ago he was without a party. The Copperheads hated him; the "Conservative Republicans" thought him too fast; the "Radical Republicans" thought him too slow; the War Democrats were looking for the chance of a return to political power. He held steadily upon his way. As he thought the country ready he took each advancing step. He issued the preparatory proclamation. He followed it with the New Year's decree. He wrote the Greeley letter, the Vallandigham letter, the Springfield letter, simple, plain, direct; letters which the heart of every man in the land interpreted, and, unlike any other instance in our political annals, every letter he wrote, every speech he made, brought him nearer to the popular heart; so that now it is a little too late to call him "well-meaning," "incompetent," "a mere joker," because it is the general conviction that he is no man's puppet; that he listens respectfully to his Cabinet, and then acts from his own convictions; that by his calm and cheerful temperament, by his shrewd insight, his practical sagacity, his undaunted patience, his profound faith in the people and their cause, he is peculiarly fitted for his solemn and responsible office. Nor is it likely that the people who elected him when he was comparatively unknown will discard him because, in the fierce light of war which tries every quality and exposes every defect, he has steadily grown in popular love and confidence.

"But what right have we to suppose," says some honest objector, "that he will not continue to be surrounded by the same counselors, and that he will not yield to the same hesitating and unfortunate influences?" The reply is that he must be judged by his administration as a whole, and not by the details of measures or of men. In selecting a candidate for the Presidency, we must aim to

find not only a man whose opinions upon public questions seem to us correct, but one who has shown that he can make the policy based upon those principles a practicable policy. It is a question of good sense. How can the country be carried through the necessary excitement of a Presidential election in the midst of civil war with the least danger and distraction?—that is the question. Is it likely to be done by a general wrangle among Union men, as to whether Mr. Chase, or General Fremont, or General Butler, or General Grant, or somebody else, are more likely to carry out the present policy of the war, and secure peace by liberty; or by the general assent of the friends of all these gentlemen that the man who is no less a lover of liberty than they, who has officially initiated and pursued that policy, and who has borne himself with patient sagacity in his difficult post, is the man to pursue that policy to the end? We know not what either of the gentlemen named would do; but we do know what Mr. Lincoln has done. Is it perfectly clear that any one of them—and no man can respect them more than we—would have achieved nobler results for the country and human liberty than he? And is the chance that they might do so worth the inevitable risk?

It is a wise friend in another State who writes: "It is difficult to understand how men really desirous to advance the cause of liberty and of the Union can, with the remembrance of the 200,000 votes cast for Woodward, Slavery and Disunion last October in Pennsylvania, think it desirable to support any candidate whose only claim to superiority over Mr. Lincoln lies in the fact of his being supported by a smaller party."

Consider, also what a cordial sympathy with the general policy of the Administration, after these three years of fiery trial, is indicated by the elections of this Spring. There was never firmer accord in an hour of great public peril between the people and the administrators of their government than there is in this country at this moment. What Patrick Henry said of the Colonies is now true of old party lines: "Where are your landmarks, your boundaries of Colonies? They are all thrown down. The distinctions between

Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American." So say we all. The boundaries of party are thrown down. We are not Democrats or Republicans, but loyal American citizens.

In that spirit, and at a time when our view of the requirements of the Presidency may be unclouded by temporary excitement, let us name the man whose career certifies the fidelity, the patience, and the sagacity that we need, and God defend him, and the right.

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